

to a girl who is in C.
fourth grade in Malaysia.

The Hague,
April 29, '76.

Dear Poay Hoon,

Thank you for your letter and I send you 'Buddhist Outlook on Daily Life'.

You write that you cannot concentrate on the abdomen and also on your study. It is a good experience, because then you can learn that the 'mind' is not 'self'. There is no mind, only many different moments of citta and each of these cittas arise because of there are conditions for its arising. Nobody can force or any kind of citta to arise. You may have an intention to try to concentrate on one point, but, other cittas come in which think many different thoughts, about what you experienced through eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body-sense or mind-door. Who can stop these cittas? Nobody in the world, they each arise because of their own conditions. When you notice it, they have arisen already, how could you push them back? The only thing that can be done is to know them as they are: not self, conditioned realities and they do not stay. That is why I say: if you cannot concentrate on anything it is a good experience, it can teach you reality: no self in thought, thinking, thinking is a kind of conditioned reality and it arises when there are conditions for it. There is worry about not being able to concentrate: also this is not a self, but a conditioned reality. Who can stop it from arising, it has arisen already. All that can be done : to know it as it is, no self in it.

As regards ~~meditation~~ meditation, there are many misunderstandings about this subject. There is samatha, tranquil meditation and there is vipassana, insight. Many people mix them up, but they have each their own method and different aim. You can read more about this in 'Buddhist Outlook on Daily Life'. Concentration on the abdomen is not vipassana. In vipassana you do not choose the object of meditation, any reality which appears now is the object: The aim is to get to know the reality which appears now as it is: a conditioned reality, no self in it. There is seeing now. Seeing is a kind of experience, it is the experience of what appears ~~thru~~ through the eyes, the experience of visible object. When we see outlines, perspective, different 'things' it is already another kind of experience, not through the eye-door but through the mind-door. These kinds of experiences have different characteristics and through experiencing them directly, without thinking about them, they can be known as they are: just different types of phenomena which experience an object. ~~What~~ Seeing experiences

visible object. Seeing is a reality which experiences something, in Pali we call it nāma. Visible object is a reality which is experienced through the eye, in visible object does not know anything, in Pali we call it: rūpa. Different kinds of rūpa are experienced through different doorways. Visible object cannot be experienced through body-sense. Through body-sense hardness, softness, heat, cold, motion or pressure can be experienced, one at a time. Only one reality appears at a time. The nāma which experiences these rūpas through the body-sense, is a reality which is different from the reality which experiences visible object through the eyes. Different from the reality which experiences sound through the ears. All these realities have nothing to do with one another, they do not arise at the same time, only one experience at a time and then it falls away immediately.

Abdomen is a reality which is experienced directly through one of the six doors. Through body-sense, no abdomen can be experienced, only hardness, softness, heat, cold, motion or pressure. Abdomen is only a name which is an idea we think about, that is all. What we call abdomen is in reality different kinds of rūpas. Hardness may appear, but there is no abdomen in the hardness. Hardness is only hardness. We cannot experience any arising and falling away yet, because this is a stage of knowledge which can only occur after one has developed a very precise knowledge through direct experience. As through the door of different nāmas and rūpas, one at a time, and one is quite sure through one's own experience when a nāma appears and when a rūpa appears, without confusing nāma and rūpa with one another.

Thus, no use to concentrate on the abdomen, it is not even samatha. Breathing is an object of samatha, but nowhere in the teachings have we found that one concentrates on the abdomen, only on the tip of the nose. Breathing is one of the most subtle objects of meditation or samatha, why do people always choose that one? The 'Visuddhimagga' commentary explains in detail about this.

I find meditation a confusing word. If we use it for vipassana people think at once that you have to sit, or be alone. Vipassana one develops in daily life without forcing, without trying to concentrate. But the right conditions for vipassana are studying and listening, and seeing the value of vipassana in one's life: ^(it brings) less wrong view of self, it brings an amount of detachment, detachment from self. People think they can meditate

eradicate attachment to sensuous objects at once with vipassanā but this is not so; this kind of attachment is eradicated only at the third stage of enlightenment.

This brings me to your remark that you find your mind far from pure. When we say pure impurity, most people think of sensuality, but this is a wrong idea. There is not only lobha (attachment) arising time and again, but also ~~....~~ aversion or anger or hate) and moha (ignorance). All these defilements are impure. Not only lobha is dangerous, also the other defilements, and wrong view is the most dangerous. So long as we take realities for self (wrong view) nothing can be done to eradicate other defilements. Then, mind does not exist, there are many moments of mind, cittas which arise and fall away, succeeding one another. Sometimes wholesome cittas (kusala cittas arise), when there are conditions for it (and these are not self, beyond control, nobody can force them to arise), but most of the time ~~it~~ there are cittas with lobha, dosa or moha. Why? Because we accumulated defilements from life to life, they are accumulated in each citta and when there are conditions akusala cittas (unwholesome cittas) arise. Moha, ignorance, is ignorance of realities, of the nama and rupas which arise in our life. There is such a lot of ignorance, but without awareness we do not even notice it and do not see the danger of it. When the citta is not kusala citta, vipakacitta (citta which is result, such as seeing, hearing) or kiriya-citta (citta which is neither cause nor result) there is akusala citta, countless times. But when awareness of nama and rupa can be cultivated little by little there are conditions for less akusala. But no self who can force this. Thus, when unwholesome thoughts arise: one should get to know the characteristic of thinking, it is only a kind of thinking which arises when there are conditions for it. The contents of the thinking is not a paramattha dhamma, an absolute reality, only a concept or idea. The thinking is real, but do not push it away, be aware of it, that is all. It is only thinking, no self in the thinking.

As regards the seeing of wrong books and films, we live in this world, sometimes we see things, we cannot close our eyes all the time. Sometimes kusala citta arises, most of the time akusala cittas arise. Wisdom can be developed through vipassana and wisdom (not self, it is a mental factor) knows what is good for oneself. When wisdom (paññā) has not been developed it cannot stop wrong action yet. When the wisdom is more keen it can stop wrong action. This is not a question of forcing

or trying to suppress. I appreciate it that you have the intention to keep the precepts, but when there is anxiety and fear for bad result of kamma, there are also akusala cittas with dosa. And the intention to observe them is a special mental factor (^{kusala}volition) which can arise only with kusala citta. The next moment there are akusala cittas which have forgotten about observing the precepts. When you have not yet attained enlightenment, do not be disappointed if you cannot observe all of them. It is not self who observes them, and don't we like to think: I am so good because I keep them, I am better than the others? That is akusala, it is conceit.

~~But~~ But it is good when kusala cittas arise which make the intention to observe the ~~precepts~~ precepts, if these never arise it is hard to observe them when there are temptations. However, vipassana is the best to cultivate the right conditions for observing the precepts. If others kill, we should have understanding that these cittas arise because of previous accumulations. If it is the right moment we can explain why we do not kill: life is the greatest gift, why should we make other beings suffer? Because sparing a life is a way of giving.

You speak about frivolous talk with friends and not being afraid to be isolated. For your friends if you do not engage in it. It depends on the citta of the moment. We all have accumulations for frivolous talk, some a little bad, some very bad. But now there is another thing. Who are your friends. This is something you should find out yourself. The Buddha often stressed how important the right friends are, the Dhamma friends. When your accumulations lead to study the Dhamma, this will lead you by conditions to the right people, it happens in life like that. If we know the value of kusala, situations in our life will change for the better. We do not have to worry about being lonely and not having friends who would help us. What use is the help from people who are not really good friends? We should have confidence in kusala, and then we will see: it brings us in situations which are helpful for more kusala.

When you have vacation, can you go to Bangkok? Then you should contact first Mr. Jonathan Abbot and the Dhammagroup of the temple 'Wat Phlong' can help you where to stay for a while in order to hear more about vipassana, every day. You will meet exactly the right people, I hope you can make it. I do not know whether it is safe to cross the border, but if you wait too long the situation will be more and more difficult.

Your poem is about kusala, thus it is fine. When we have read the scriptures more we prefer the scriptures: so deep, not one word to many, so to the point. Kindest regards,